

CHAPTER THREE

GETTING FOOD

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261 For the Lepchas, as for almost all primitive peoples, by far the most important subject in their lives is food. Far and away the greatest part of their lives is centred round food-getting; it is impossible to over-stress its importance. But because food-getting is so constant a preoccupation, and because it is fairly featureless and uneventful, it nearly always, it seems to me, receives far less attention than it deserves. The features chiefly dealt with by ethnologists, including of course the greater part of this book, are those which take place during the primitive's leisure. Some peoples, I am aware, centre their social and religious life about food; but this is not the case with the Lepchas. Food-products play a considerable rôle in the objects of sacrifice, but with the lamas this aspect is not stressed; most ceremonial objects are made out of grain-flour and butter, but this is because they are the most convenient and easily accessible materials; by the time they have been fashioned the edible qualities of these objects are not apparent. A minor sacrifice is made when a new field is taken into cultivation for the first time, and prayers are said, usually by a layman, after each sowing; and the Mun make elaborate ceremonies, to be described later, yearly at the flowering of the cardamum, and at the sowing and gathering of dry rice. In the annual cycle of lamaist ceremonies there are a certain number which are devoted to the protection of crops from hail and predatory beasts, and, before the sowing starts, some seed is collected from each household and given a communal blessing at a monastery service; but these rites take an insignificant place in the yearly sum of religious ceremonies. Lepcha religion is above all occupied with health.

261 Food does however play a very important rôle in the Lepchas' emotional lives. Love, whether between spouses, friends, or
152 parents and children, is considered to be the result of mutual

CHAPTER SEVEN

RELIGION I: LAMAISM

[Lamaism, or, as it is sometimes called, Mahayana Buddhism, is a subject of the greatest complexity, to the study of which scholars of world-wide repute have devoted their whole lives. Its organisation is as elaborate as that of the medieval Catholic church, its hagiology, demonology and ritual are infinitely more complicated, and it is split into nearly as many sub-sects as contemporary Christianity. My ignorance of Tibetan prevents me discussing it in any great detail. Among the Lepchas of Zongu the practices of lamaism present more variety of detail than any other single facet of their lives; my notes on lamaist ritual far exceed those on any other subject. I had at one moment considered comparing the lamaism as I saw it practised in Lingthem with the accounts given by other people of more orthodox practices in unmixed lamaist communities, but even confining myself to those rites at which I was present, I soon discovered that the bulk of the material involved would be out of all proportion to its place in the social and religious life of the Lepchas. I have therefore limited myself to a generalised account of the impact of lamaism on the life of the Lepchas of Zongu; in practically no instances have I given the details of ritual or of the fabrication of ritual objects, not because I do not know them, but because they would overweight what is from my point of view a subsidiary subject. To a lesser degree these remarks also apply to the rituals of the Mun and to the extremely elaborate mythology and folklore derived from both religions. Possibly in the future (I hope with the collaboration of Mr. C. J. Morris) I may publish the full details of the ritual and belief of both religions in a different work.]

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The discussion of the Lepchas' religion is rendered extremely complicated by the fact that they practise simultaneously, and without any feeling of theoretical discomfort, two (or possibly three) mutually contradictory religions: of these the older Lepcha

- 771 religion is nameless but, on the analogy of lamaism, I propose calling
 756 it the Mun religion (after the title of the priests); the worship of
 the people of Mayel, which was possibly originally separate,
 forms nowadays a part of the Mun religion; and this religion
 is in all its major beliefs opposed to lamaism. For the Mun priest-
 hood goes by the possession of a manifestation of a supernatural
 spirit which is attached to a family line, so that there can never
 be more than one simultaneously in each group (there may be two
 in one biological family, one spirit descending from the father's
 group, and one from the mother's). The chief function of the
 Mun is to ward off the misfortunes and illnesses caused by devils,
 which is done, partly by sacrifices, especially animal sacrifices, and
 partly by direct communing with the supernaturals. On certain
 occasions the Mun become possessed by their guardian spirit and
 prophesy; at death ceremonies they summon the soul of the dead
 man to speak his last wishes through their mouth, and then conduct
 it into the *rum lyang*—the place of the Gods—where it is reborn as
 an infant, and grows up to an eternal life similar to the life here on
 earth.

771 In lamaism on the contrary priesthood and sanctity are acquired
 779 by learning and not by inspiration; the sacrifice of animals is a
 heinous sin; the future can be learned by calculations from the
 holy books and not by inspiration; the soul of the dead wanders
 for a short time in a sort of purgatory, before being reincarnated
 either in another form on this earth, or going to some heaven or
 hell, as different as imagination can make them from anything
 experienced on earth. Most important of all, lamaist ethics are
 founded on a belief in individual destiny and a sense of sin; lamaism
 contains a long, explicit and detailed list of sins which can be
 performed by human beings, and which are visited on the evil-doer,
 first by feelings of remorse and secondly by punishment either in
 this life or in future reincarnations. Lepchas have a word for sin,
 because they have borrowed the Tibetan word, but they have, I
 think, no idea of sin; and the only act to which the word is com-
 monly applied is to the killing of animals; by a few who have
 accepted lamaism it is also applied to envy or slander, expressed in
 thought, word or deed. With these exceptions they do not use the
 word 'sin,' *la-yo*, in connection with individual behaviour; the
 supernatural sanctions which punish disapproved-of actions are
 expressed as *nam-toak*, a year of disaster which affects the whole
 community. Even for acts less violently disapproved of, which

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incur supernatural dangers, it is not the wrong-doer alone who is involved, but the whole of his family group; punishment is seen if members of a person's family die or suffer, even though the evil-doer survives himself. Indeed according to Lepcha ethics it could be said that anti-social acts are graded according to the number of people they may affect; only for acts of minor importance is there personal and individual punishment which falls on the evil-doer.

On some subjects there is agreement between the two religions, notably on the ambivalent nature of supernatural beings; in both religions the supernaturals are divided into three categories, mostly benevolent, neutral, and mostly malevolent. The supernaturals which are mostly benevolent are called gods, *rum*, those mostly malevolent devils, *moong*; but both agree that if the gods are displeased they take on a terrifying and threatening aspect, and that the best way to deal with devils is to flatter them temporarily by treating them as gods; and whether gods or devils are prayed to the ceremony always ends by begging them vehemently to go away. Whatever their chief aspects the supernaturals are potentially dangerous. The ambivalent supernaturals, such as *Thyak-dum*, or Hlamen Djémé (a lamaist supernatural equated with the Mun spirit), are called either *moong* or *rum* according to the personal dealings of the speaker with them at that moment.

Lamas and Mun are also agreed on the meaningful and prophetic character of dreams. The dreams of everybody are significant for those who have the knowledge to interpret them; the significance lies, not in the actions of the dream (as a rule), but in the seeing of certain objects which have a symbolical meaning. The causation of dreams is however different for the two religions, as is to some extent their interpretation; for the Mun dreams are sent by supernaturals, for the lamas they are the experiences of the soul released from the body by sleep; unbound by space or time the soul has experiences with the souls of other people, supernaturals and objects, and, on its return, informs the body it inhabits. For the Mun the soul is a very vague concept, practically only having an independent existence after the death of the body; the lamas however know all about souls.

The content of dreams can be divided into two classes; those that foretell some future 'natural' event, and those that foretell the presence of some, usually dangerous, supernatural. For the latter some apotropaic ceremony is usually available and in some cases essential; according to the supernatural indicated the ceremony will be performed by a lama or Mun.

essential; according to the supernatural indicated the ceremony will be performed by a lama or Mun.

- 771 The following objects seen in dreams are lucky: gathering sand, 779 collecting wood, seeing a woman with a big goitre: they foretell a 756 good harvest; to put on new clothes or gather firewood or to have 787 stones thrown at you mean the acquisition of property. Solid 777 excreta indicate a good buckwheat harvest, liquid ones that the harvest will be destroyed by storms. To be covered with filth indicates coming wealth. To dream of climbing or going up hill is propitious. If you dream you are cut or are given silver it means that you will the next day be given a present of *chi*. The following objects are unlucky: a sick person lying down indicates a bad harvest: a tooth coming out means a relation will die, if from the right side of the mouth a paternal relation, if from the left a maternal; hair coming out or even combing hair also foretells death. A neighbour pounding rice foretells a death in his house. To dream of drinking foretells rain. A lake, swimming, or falling into water all foretell illness. A river foretells a message from the State authorities, agreeable if the water is clear, disagreeable if muddy. To dream that you are excreting in public means that your relations are slandering you. Being naked in a crowd foretells illness, as do dirty or ugly people. The setting sun foretells the death of kings. To dream of the dead foretells illness, to dream of a landslide, death, and also to dream of picking fungus. A dream of a red cloth or red flower means you will cut yourself, to dream of chicken's droppings means that some one is going to poison you. The list could be continued almost indefinitely.

- 756 Specially ominous dreams are: to dream of a kite or of men 771 flying (this indicates the presence of Shook-sor *moong* and demands a ceremony by a Mun): to dream of fire (this indicates illness and 779 also demands a ceremony by a Mun): to dream of a storm blowing 787 into your house and lifting off the roof (this indicates that you are the object of malicious sorcery and lamas must perform ceremonies): to dream of going down hill carrying a load (this foretells illness; lamas and Mun can both avert it): to dream of a snake (this foretells danger and needs elaborate lamaist ceremonies); and so on. These specially ominous dreams are fortunately rare, for it would be considered dangerously rash to neglect the proper ceremonies.
- [824] For less strongly ill-omened dreams it is permissible to make a hole in a leaf of a special species of wild arum and spit through it; this will avert the danger.

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793 and they are expected to support, at any rate in part, the Dorjé Lapoon and the monastery custodian; they also have to give fixed contributions to the feasts which validate the rise in grade of the higher ecclesiastics.

● 771 The Lepchas have been converts to lamaism at least one, and
177 probably two centuries, but they have, if I may so express it, sterilised and ignored those aspects of the alien religion which were sharply opposed to their major existing attitudes. They have as it were, swallowed lamaism whole, but excreted the irritating portions. The mythology presented no difficulties; their pantheon was always large and expanding, through the divination of new supernaturals, and further numbers of similar supernaturals were easily accepted; it was understandable that foreigners should know of large numbers of new ones, almost as worthy of worship as the older established ones. The idea of a priesthood in which the priests need training by older priests was also one they already possessed; and that priests should be designated by divination (the horoscope) or by heredity, rather than by the possession of a hereditary spirit was an easy modification of existing attitudes. So too was the idea that the future could be learned by calculation, as well as by dreams and inspiration; the Lepchas have a complete belief in horoscopes and have incorporated them into their lives. Similarly the idea that an essential part of the efficacy of ritual lies in word-for-word repetition was one they already possessed; that, instead of learning by rote, these rituals could be found through the alien art of reading, was to their mind a distinct advantage for lamaism, and the books and those that read them are respected and revered. Similarly mystic contemplation, to expel devils or acquire supernatural powers, had its parallel in the *mun-then*, the mystic communion, of the Mun.

The social organisation was a more alien concept; to a certain, though not completely formulated, extent, they have equated the organisation of lamas with that of the family; for a lama to sleep with the wife of an inferior lama is likened to the incest of an elder brother sleeping with his younger brother's wife, though there are no sanctions against such acts; the Dorjé Lapoon are equated with the grandfathers who withdraw from work at the end of their lives to be supported by their sons and grandsons. Nevertheless this parallel does not hold good altogether, and, in so far as they have accepted the social organisation of lamaism the Lepchas have incorporated a new and alien element into their lives. This

● 771 new element is however not of major importance; although
 177 religious titles are used in civil life no other distinction is made
 between layman and lamas; the social organisation is confined
 to the monastery. There is a difference in appearance between
 laymen and lamas; laymen wear their hair in a long plait whereas
 lamas have their heads shaved or at least close cropped; and though
 lamas often wear ordinary clothes for field work, on social occasions
 they always wear Tibetan, and not Lepcha dress. But lamas do
 not form a group within the society; the fact that a man is a lama
 is only one of the aspects of his personality, less important than his
 wealth or poverty, his industry or laziness, his relations by kin
 and marriage and friendship with other people. Only in their death
 [766] are lamas given distinguishing treatment; they are usually cremated
 and never buried, whereas laymen are usually buried and never
 cremated; both laymen and lamas may, if the horoscope indicates
 it, be thrown into the river.

157 As a generalisation it may be said that the Lepchas have accepted
 177 the ritual, the validating mythology, and the organisation of
 771 lamaism; what they have completely refused to accept is the ethic.
 Like the other 'higher religions' lamaism is individualist; it
 holds that a person's chief concern should be with his own spiritual
 welfare. This, the key-concept of lamaism, was and is an alien
 attitude to the Lepchas. As has already been said, the Lepcha
 attitude to disapproved-of acts is social, and not individual; it is
 the society, and not the evil-doer, which bears the brunt of wicked
 [52] acts. The Lepchas admit feelings of shame—feelings so strong that
 they can lead to suicide—following exteriorised social disapproval;
 771 they do not admit guilt-feelings. The more pious lamas and some
 177 laymen accept intellectually the idea of reincarnation, but they do
 not accept emotionally the idea of reincarnation being the result of
 personal acts. The form of reincarnation is discovered from horo-
 scopes, and those depend on the time of birth or death, that is to
 say on chance, and not on individual behaviour. Sin is practically
 equated with the killing of animals; this is felt to be a dangerous
 act and is thoroughly congruent with the Lepchas' inhibition of
 aggression in other spheres of life. But the idea of asceticism, for
 example, being meritorious is so alien to the Lepchas, that even
 pious lamas have confided their private belief that the *gé-long* (as
 the monks who have taken their vows of asceticism are called) get
 their satisfactions on the sly.

I should like to suggest that this selective conversion to a new

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religion, with the rejection of those elements which are alien to the major cultural attitudes, is probable when the converted culture is fully integrated; I think parallels might be found in the conversion to Hinduism of the Nepali, and some of the native Christian and Mahomedan sects in Africa, and, possibly, among the American negroes. When the society is more or less disrupted and the convert feels himself to be alone in an alien world, individual conversion is likely to be much more complete; the Christian Lepchas with whom I came in contact in India and Gangtok had accepted the individualised Christian ethic, with its sense of sin, completely; their whole character-formation and major attitudes appeared to be modified by this conversion; and I very much regret that I was unable to study this character alteration in any detail. I should like to suggest the axiom that *Fully integrated cultures will only accept in an imported complex those elements which are congruent to the existing major attitudes, or which are felt to fill a want; those elements which are violently opposed to existing attitudes will either be excluded or so modified as to bring them into congruence with existing attitudes.* If this axiom is correct it would appear that we can learn from the observation of primitive societies much about the probable results of imposing violent social changes on simple or more complex societies.

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The vocation to become a lama is determined by the horoscope which is cast on the third day after birth. All the children of lamas should themselves become lamas, but in practice usually only the eldest son follows the whole career; the younger ones receive sufficient preliminary instruction to enable them to read one or two sacred manuals. The children of laymen are also occasionally predestined to become lamas, usually because they are reincarnations of dead lamas; should a child so predestined not follow his vocation as a lama he will become a half-wit. It occasionally happens that people who are not predestined to become lamas wish to study; they may do so, but 'their destiny will overcome them'.

If it is seen that the infant is going to become a lama he is presented with a yellow sash, and from a very early age his father will bring him to monastery ceremonies to allow him to get accustomed to the special atmosphere. Between the ages of ten and fifteen a teacher is chosen for the child. The choice of a teacher is supposed to be determined by his knowledge exclusively; under

755 To a certain extent the employment of lamas or Mun to drive away devils depends on the wishes and wealth of the sufferer or his near relatives; as with us some people are hypochondriac, some people refuse to take even necessary precautions when they are badly ill and some say and feel that they cannot afford the time or money. Some illnesses everybody can diagnose and tell which is the causing demon and what is the necessary curative ceremony, just as many people can recognise and know the treatment of the commoner illnesses. Others are more obscure and consultation has to be made. For the lama there are two possible forms of consultation; he can divine with his rosary, as has already been described, or he can consult the astrological books employed in horoscopes which will tell infallibly what devil on that day would be troubling the person born on the date of the sufferer's birth. In nearly every case a Mun and a lama are consulted simultaneously; should their diagnoses differ a third opinion will be sought and even a fourth and fifth until the Mun and the lama are in agreement as to the cause of the illness and therefore as to its cure. The Mun divines partly by his rosary and partly by *munthen*-ing, that is, communicating with his or her possessing spirit. Very often before consultation with a Mun consultation will be made with a layman who possesses a rosary and knows how to use it to discover which Mun—or rather the Mun born in which year—will be most suitable to deal with this particular patient.

- [77] The fear of illness and the ceremonies against it form by far the largest impact of religion on the life of the average Lepcha; a lama is far more a doctor than he is a priest in his function. Medicine in our sense of the word plays no rôle in the lama's cures; the patient is given no drugs of any sort to take; the cause of all illnesses and misfortunes is considered to be supernatural and therefore only supernatural methods are suitable for dealing with them. The Lepchas' knowledge of drugs is anyhow very slight but those who do know medicinal herbs can employ them without any form of ceremony. Religious consultation is very seldom held in the case of the illness of infants or young children; if a child is badly ill the most usual form of cure is to try a change of air, to take the child on a visit to the house of some relative—usually a relative by marriage, either the wife's parents or the wife's brothers. Children until they achieve complete physical independence are barely considered as fully human; they are not given any burial ceremony nor are they the subject of other ceremonies. Children
- 858
[855]
- [766]

CHAPTER EIGHT

RELIGION II: THE MUN

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As opposed to lamaism the Mun religion carries with it no social organisation; the Mun and their parallel priests are simply individuals who, through their possession by a spirit, have certain gifts and duties; unlike the lamas and the civil officers their position carries with it no sort of title in ordinary life. Besides the Mun three other types of priesthood by possession are recognised; these are the Padem, the Yaba, and the Pau. The Mun spirit is a female spirit, the other three are male. They are attached to family lines and are roughly hereditary; they often descend from grandfather to grandson or from grandmother to granddaughter; but there is no regularity about this and a man may inherit a possessing spirit from a woman, and *vice versa*; once the vehicle dies the spirit may not choose another body immediately and large groups may be without the possessing spirit for a number of years. The manifestation of the spirit (for the spirits themselves live immortal beyond Kinchenjunga) may choose anybody for its vehicle, with one exception; none of the spirits will enter a lama or his own children, though they may enter his family.

Both men and women can be Mun, but only men can be Padem (or Bum-thing as they are called outside Zongu); these are both pure Lepcha spirits and are essentially similar, save that the Padem are far less powerful, and that instruction by an already qualified Padem is optional, whereas for Mun a three year course of instruction is obligatory. Padem are weaker than Mun and capable of exorcising far fewer devils; they cannot prophesy nor perform the death ceremony. For many men Padem is the first step to becoming Mun; in Lingthem there are altogether eight Mun¹ of which four

¹ They are (men) Katel, Gongyop, Thyak Thimbu (Gongyop's elder brother) and Agyung (the adopted son of Serving): of these Gongyop practices regularly, Katel occasionally, the other two hardly at all. (women)

CHAPTER NINE

RELIGION III: THE PEOPLE OF MAYEL

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I stated earlier that the Lepchas have two or perhaps three religions. [756]
 My reason for this statement is that the ritual connected with 771/●
 harvesting and hunting, though performed by Mun, have a number 795
 of features which do not occur elsewhere. It seems to me possible 241
 that the worship of the people of Mayel, and perhaps of Pong rum [224]
 the god of hunters, is of a different origin to the other Mun cere-
 monies; unfortunately too little is known about the ritual of neigh-
 bouring tribes to enable profitable speculation to be made as to
 whether either or both ceremonies are relatively modern importa-
 tions from outside, or whether they are on the contrary the oldest
 Lepcha customs. The most outstanding differences with other Mun [562]
 ritual, and indeed with ordinary Lepcha life, is, first, a discrimination
 against women, secondly, an insistence on virginity for some of the
 celebrants, and thirdly a suggestion of the danger of menstruating
 women. Women may perform the sacrifice to the people of Mayel,
 but if they do so the ceremony is curtailed and fewer objects
 employed; they not only cannot sacrifice to Pong rum but must not
 even be aware when the sacrifice takes place; and the popped corn
 and *chi* which are employed in it, if not made by a man, which is
 preferable, must be made by a virgin girl. The chief offerings to [782]
 the people of Mayel are the *lafét* sacrifice and *sakyou faat*; the
 small bird for the *lafét* must be killed by a virgin boy, and the
 strained *chi* poured into the buttered cup by a virgin girl.

This insistence upon virginity is unparalleled in Lepcha life;¹ 241
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¹ The only other instance is in the sacrifice to a pair of demons who cause a coughing disease (? tuberculosis) and whose presence and ritual were divined and by a Nandjému less than ten years ago. For this ceremony the popped corn must be made by a virgin girl, and the Mun must fast for twenty-four hours before the sacrifice. Only two people know how to perform this very modern importation.

LIVING WITH LEPCHAS

36

They

437 have learnt to overcharge already, and use extortion in dealing, as is the custom with the people of the plains; but it is clumsily done, and never accompanied with the grasping air and insufferable whine of the latter.

157 "A more interesting and attractive companion than the Lepcha I never lived with: cheerful, kind, and patient with a master to whom he is attached; rude but not savage, ignorant and yet intelligent; with a simple resource of a plain knife he makes his house and furnishes yours, with a speed, alacrity, and ingenuity that while away that well-known long hour when the weary pilgrim frets for his couch. In all my dealings with these people they proved scrupulously honest. Except for drunkenness and carelessness I never had to complain of any of the merry troop; some of whom, bare-headed and barelegged, possessing little or nothing save a cotton garment and a long knife, followed me for many months on subsequent occasions, from the scorching plains to the everlasting snows. Ever foremost in the forest or on the bleak mountain, and ever ready to help, to carry, collect or cook, they cheer on the traveller by their unostentatious zeal in his service, and are spurs to his progress."

HOOKE, 1854. A very accurate estimate.

A sentimental Colonel sums up the Lepchas.

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"What or wheresoever might have been their original source, the Lepchas here appeared in the most simple, primitive state, living in the midst of the vast, wild, magnificent forests, old as the hills themselves, and, as I think, I mention to you, each family residing by itself, having no villages or communities, and but little intercourse with each other; thus they dwelt in pretty cottages, around which they cultivated their plot of ground. Their religion was particularly simple; they believed in one Good Spirit, and in innumerable evil spirits; to the former they conceived their worship due, and to Him they offered their prayers and thanksgivings; the latter they considered prowled about, and haunted every spot; to them they attributed whatever

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sickness or misfortune befell, therefore deemed it requisite 771
to propitiate them, which they did by offerings of rice, etc.
The first fruits of the season were always offered to the Good
Spirit. I may state that the purity of their belief was, at a
period antecedent to our arrival, somewhat perverted by
the introduction from Tibet of the Buddhist religion; it has,
and still has, however, but little hold on them. . . .

"The British Government has again conferred on the 636
Sikkim ruler an annual and larger allowance, to be enjoyed 177
as long as order is maintained in his dominions. Since then
the country has become more tranquil and, as far as the
snows (but no farther), is again thrown open to visitors.
Sikkim, however, is fast deteriorating. The influx of the
Bhutias has increased, and the power of the Buddhists has
become firmly established; the Gurkhas have also com-
menced to settle in it, and the grandest and most glorious
scenery in the world is becoming completely destroyed. With
the destruction of the forests in Sikkim, the charm of the
country will pass away, the climate will change, and unless
speedy measures be taken to prevent it, the Lepchas will
pine, and in time cease to exist. Much more might be said,
but enough has been represented to account for the
deplorable fall of the Lepchas.

"Of the language I cannot speak too highly. The simple 192
and primitive state in which the Lepchas lived is admirably
shown. It has no primary words (beyond the words for gold
and silver) to express money, merchants or merchandise,
fairs or markets. Their peaceful and gentle character is
evinced by their numerous terms of tenderness and com- [195]
passion, and by the fact that not one word of abuse exists
in their language. . . . Of all the almost inconceivable 824
diversity of trees with which the hills are covered; of all the 82
almost incalculable variety of plants and flowers with which
the forests are filled; the Lepchas can tell you the names of
all, they can distinguish at a glance the difference in the
species of each genus of plants, which would require the
skill of a practised botanist to perceive; and this information

774 consideration and its neglect would not cause any immediate
 782 retribution; but a failure to propitiate the actual spirits
 might be fraught with all sorts of evil consequences and no
 one would willingly omit to carry it out.

● [771] It is not possible for an ordinary man to have direct
 756 dealings with the spirit world, nor indeed would he normally
 know the cause of his particular trouble. The cause of
 certain common ills, such for instance as coughs and colds,
 boils or fever, are, of course, well known to most people, but
 not the special knowledge required to make the necessary
 sacrifices to the particular demon which has caused them.
 For this it is necessary to have recourse to a proper
 practitioner, either a *Mun* or a *Yukman*, which is the word
 used by Lepchas to denote a Lama. It seems certain that
 prior to the introduction of Buddhism into Sikkim such
 sacerdotal functions as were required by the Lepchas were
 carried out by Muns. Their services are still much in demand
 in Lingtem, where they work in close conjunction with the
 Lamas. In other parts of Sikkim, however, their numbers are
 steadily decreasing, and the tendency is for all priestly
 functions to be carried out only by Lamas. In the Kalimpong
 district (in British India) there are still large colonies of
 Lepchas, and amongst these people Muns have almost
 ceased to exist. Such as there are practise almost secretly,
 for their presence is not welcome to orthodox Lamas.

793 "A notable feature of Lamaism throughout all its sects,"
 notes Waddell, "and decidedly un-Buddhistic, is that the
 Lama is a priest rather than a monk. He assigns himself an
 [536] indispensable place in the religion and has coined the current
 saying, 'Without a Lama in front there is no (approach to)
 God.' He performs sacerdotal functions on every possible
 occasion, and a large proportion of the order is almost
 entirely engaged in this work. And such services are in much
 demand, for the people are in hopeless bondage to the
 demons, and not altogether unwilling slaves to their exacting
 worship."

795 The Lamas of Sikkim belong to the *Nis-Ma-pa* or

773 confusion of legends concerning Padmasambhava and the God Creator of the Lepchas, the traditions are today rather vague. According to some previous publications (e.g. Mainwaring, G.B.: A Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) language, Calcutta 1878, p. XI) the name of the God Creator was *Ta she thing*. I heard however very frequently also the statement that the name of this chief god was *Tuk do thing*, who was followed several thousand years later by another supernatural being called *Ta she thing*.

000 9. This most prominent mountain of Sikkim occupies a very important place in the ancient traditions of the Lepchas as well as in the religious life all Sikkimese Buddhists. For accounts of Lepcha ceremonies in honour of Mount Kanchenjunga see Gorer, G. Himalayan Village, London 1938, pp. 201—203; Morris, J.: Living with Lepchas, London 1938, pp. 274—276; R. Nebesky de Wojkowicz and G. Gorer: The use of thread-crosses in Lepcha lamaist ceremonies, The Eastern Anthropologist, Vol. IV., No. 2, Lucknow 1951, pp. 70—73. Some notes, concerning the mountain god of Kanchenjunga (Tb. *Gangs chhes mized lnga*, "The five glacier treasuries") as venerated by the Buddhists of Sikkim, are to be found in Ribbach, S. H.: Vier Bilder des Padmasambhava und seiner Gefolgschaft, Hamburg 1917, and Hoffmann, H.: Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Boen Religion, Akademie der Wissenschaften, Mainz 1950.

10. Compare Gorer, Himalayan Village, p. 192

11. Compare Dictionary of the Lepcha Language, p. 114b.

791 12. The *Bong thing* and *Mus* are the main sorcerers of the Lepchas. A *Bong thing* is always
793 male, a *Mus* mostly female, sometimes also male. The position of *Mus* and *Bong thing*
756 is inherited within the family, one of its members being chosen for this task by the supernaturalists, who protect and at times also possess him. With the help of their guardian deities the *Bong thing* and *Mus* are able to avert and counteract the influence of malignant spirits, cure illness, etc. It is also their task to perform the numerous ceremonies, devoted to the worship of benevolent deities and to the appeasement of demons, as well as to carry out all rites connected with the more important events of Lepcha life. They are believed to be in possession of strong supernatural powers, which at times were also used to harm people. Thus the Chronicles of the Maharajas mention, that at the beginning of the 18th century several Lepcha sorcerers tried to kill by black magic the reigning fourth Maharaja, *Phyag rdor nam gyäl*. Also to his successor *Chhos gyäl agyur med nam gyäl*, who had ascended the throne in 1717, some Lepcha magicians tried to show their skill: they made a knot into the water of a fountain and suspended a stone from the sky, they draw figures on the surface of water, span sand into a rope and at last they made the roofs of the Maharaja's palace and a neighbouring temple meet. While the ruler with his retinue were very impressed by these miracles, some lamas who had also come to witness this spectacle, were not affected by the powers displayed and they subsequently killed the magicians, claiming that they were imposters.

791 Another group of Lepcha sorcerers are men called *Pa ue* (Tb. *dPa bo*) and their female
177 counterparts, who bear the name *Nyes jo mo* (Tb. *rNal abyor ma*). They are said to become possessed by Tibetan deities, who cause them to speak Tibetan in the trance and who advise them in matters of divination. The *Pa ue* and *Nyes jo mo* dress in Tibetan garments and they use Tibetan lama bell (*Dril bu*) and a small, two-faced drum (*rNga chäsang*) as their main instruments. They preserved many traditions of the ancient, pre-Buddhist Boen faith of Tibet and their performances have therefore nothing to do with the ceremonies of the Sikkimese lamas, of whom they are entirely independent.

791 A third group of Lepcha sorcerers, also of minor importance, are the *Ys ba* and *Ys*
177 *ma*, who are male and female respectively. They are supposed to become possessed by
771 Limbu spirits and they therefore bear these two names, under which the Limbu sorcerers are known. Their main instruments are metal gongs and divination balls, called *Yak*. Certain similarities between religious practices of the Lepcha sorcerers and some ancient Tibetan customs are the reason for frequently occurring statements in books on Tibet, that the old Lepcha faith is identical with the Boen religion of that country. A comparative study of both beliefs shows however, that the Lepcha faith is certainly not identical with that form of the Boen religion, which it assumed after the commencement of its struggle with Buddhism. It seems rather that it corresponds in many points to the old shamanistic stratum of Central Asia, out of which in Tibet the Boen developed to a religion.

T Tibetans. They are reported to be used by the Mongols
 who call them *öngge*, "colour", makhabut "body" or tor-
 gaguli "obstacle", the last name certainly referring to their
 ritual purpose. It seems, however, that their use has become
 very rare in Mongolia in more recent times.¹⁸

Other reports show that thread-crosses are used by the
 Kachin and some of the Naga tribes, especially in death
 ceremonies, and for averting or destroying evil.¹⁹

Further to the southwest we find, that thread-crosses
 are extensively used in the religious ceremonies of the Lepchas
 of Sikkim. The Lepchas, who adhere today to Tibetan
 Buddhism, have preserved some practices of their original
 religion, which—after the name of its priests—is called the
 Mun religion.²⁰ Consequently there is a mixture of rites and
 beliefs of both religions and it is very difficult to state with
 certainty, which of the rites and religious ideas originated
 from the Mun or from Lamaism. This situation is made
 still more complicated by the fact that the Buddhist teachings
 introduced into Sikkim were those of the unreformed
rNying ma pa, the "Old Sect", which preserved in its reli-
 gious practices many customs originating from the Bön,
 which, however, have scarcely been studied up to now.

How closely the Mun religion and Lamaism became
 associated among the Lepchas is shown by the fact that many
 of the Lepcha ceremonies are concurrently performed by
 Mun priests and lamas.

Thread-crosses are called in Lepcha *deu*—corresponding
 to the Tibetan *Do*, *mDos*—or *Yeu*, an equivalent of the
 Tibetan *Ye*, *Yas*. As to the meaning of the thread-cross,
 it is generally regarded by Lepcha lamas as a "seat", "house"
 or "place" for supernatural beings. The tufts of wool,
 which are fastened to the thread-cross or are placed on top
 of bamboo sticks planted near the structure are supposed
 to represent clouds, surrounding the "palace".

The remainder of this paper consists of details of Lepcha
 ceremonies in which thread-crosses are used. Some of
 these ceremonies have already been described and only
 short accounts will be given of these; in most cases there

Bhotanese, and others. Rheumatism is frequent, and inter-¹⁶⁴
mittent fevers, with ague; also violent and often fatal
remittents, almost invariably induced by sleeping in the
hot valleys, especially at the beginning and end of the
rains. The European complaints of liver and bowel disease
are all but unknown. Death is regarded with horror. The ⁷⁶¹
dead are burnt or buried, sometimes both; much depending ⁷⁶⁴
on custom and position. Omens are sought in the entrails ⁷⁸⁷
of fowls, &c., and other vestiges of their savage origin are
still preserved, though now gradually disappearing.

The Lepchas profess no religion, though acknowledging ⁷⁷¹ ●
the existence of good and bad spirits. To the good they
pay no heed; "Why should we?" they say, "the good
spirits do us no harm; the evil spirits, who dwell in every
rock, grove, and mountain, are constantly at mischief,
and to them we must pray, for they hurt us." Every ⁷⁵⁶
tribe has a priest-doctor; he neither knows nor attempts
to practise the healing art, but is a pure exorcist; all ^[753]
bodily ailments being deemed the operations of devils,
who are cast out by prayers and invocations. Still they
acknowledge the Lamas to be very holy men, and were the ^[793]
latter only moderately active, they would soon convert
all the Lepchas. Their priests are called "Bijooas:"
they profess mendicancy, and seem intermediate between
the begging friars of Tibet, whose dress and attributes they
assume, and the exorcists of the aboriginal Lepchas: they
sing, dance (masked and draped like harlequins), beg,
bless, curse, and are merry mountebanks; those that affect ^[774]
more of the Lama Boodhist carry the "Mani," or revolving
praying machine, and wear rosaries and amulets; others
again are all tatters and rags. They are often employed
to carry messages, and to transact little knaveries. The ⁷⁵⁶
natives stand in some awe of them, and being besides of a ⁷⁸¹

286 --characteristic Lepcha patterns. The threads used for the weaving
 [384] of cloth were formerly dyed with vegetable matter, of which likewise
 291 a few samples were brought along. Among the articles of clothing
 301 there is a complete woman's costume with the pertinent ornaments:
 two large needles connected by a silver chain, a pair of earrings set
 with corals, as well as two necklaces -- one mainly of turquoise and
 the other consisting of corals and blue glass beads. A hat made of
 reed and types of nettle and a pair of men's earrings decorated with
 turquoises were acquired as especially characteristic articles of the
 garb formerly customary for Lepcha men.

534 [270] As far as musical instruments are concerned, the collec-
 tion comprises three flutes of varying size -- one of which is a double
 flute -- a jewsharp, a gong with wooden drumsticks, as well as two
 old war drums whose cylinders consist of copper. They were presented
 [431] by bs Tan hdzin rnam rgyal, the sixth king of Sikkim (born 1769,
 ascended the throne in 1780, died in Lhasa in 1793) to the Lepcha
 chieftain of Sukmi, who bore the Tibetan title of "Dsöngpön"
 (r dzong dpon, "bailiff"), as an acknowledgment of faithful war service.

756 A few especially valuable articles of the collection are parts of
 [523] the equipment of a Mun priestess (a pouch with a carrying strap, deco-
 rated with eagles' claws, bird bills, the teeth of wild animals, and
 shells; plumes serving as a headdress; and parts of a rosary with a
 bell) which had been handed down for about three centuries in the
 family of a well-known Mun priestess who died a few years ago: Norkit
 [746] Lepchani from the village of Seket. This equipment, of which only
 one similar specimen is known in Sikkim, was occasionally used by
 a Mun priestess in the king's palace at Gangtok during the ceremonies
 that take place annually in the night before the ceremony of the Lama
 dance in honor of the mountain god Gangs chhen mdzod lnga. In re-

756 regard to other objects used in the original pre-Buddhist religion of the
 771 Lepchas, which were likewise acquired, the following should be named:
 amulets, magic wands, little baskets for keeping substances for magic
 healing, a little scaling ladder [Steigbaum] used at the burial of the
 [764] Lepcha priests known as Bong thing, which was supposed to aid the soul
 of the Bong thing in its ascent to heaven -- one of the many evidences
 of the shaman ideas that are deeply rooted in the Lepcha religion --,
 a gong used by the Yaba priests, and paraphernalia for performing cere-
 monies in honor of the ancestral spirits, local divinities, and for the
 appeasement of the demons that were unleashed during the wars of
 the priests during which they used magic.

Jensen has reported, it is likewise evident, that they occurred⁷⁹⁶ as a repetition of that first killing, from which new life was⁷⁸² engendered. ⁷⁷¹

Thus it is clear then, that the slaughtering of cattle which Zarathustra again and again condemned, was the imitating and repeating of the indeed cruel, but—blessed killing of the original bull.

And in the closest connection with this, Zarathustra condemned in the same place the Haoma sacrifice, although, it is true he does not mention the name Haoma, but uses instead, an old unmistakable title of the Haoma.

This simultaneous mentioning of the Haoma endorses my opinion that with the words, 'the bull must be killed,' the sacrifice of the bull in the Mitra cult and its cosmic meaning are alluded to." This bull is said to be identical with Haoma.⁷⁷

Very correctly does Lommel lay emphasis on the drawing of ethnological and prehistorical parallels for the explanation of the ritual. Our case is specially instructive for such an interpretation. The beliefs of the Rong and their rites prove beyond the shadow of doubt that the cult of the intoxicating drink and the cult of the bull are not identical, but are two altogether independent cults, and moreover that they are not the imitation of the original offering of the deity itself. Among the oldest ethnological tribes this mystification is not to be found; but it is certainly so among the younger peoples especially among those with the peculiar mystery-religion. Others believe that the intoxicating Haoma has been supplanted by the milk-haoma which links with an old milk-mystery. The Mithra religion is Apolonic, sober, formalistic; the Iranian Gatha-religion on the contrary, is Dionysiac, and is familiar with the Haoma delirium, with ecstasies, trances, and the wandering of souls in a state of trance.

Among the Indo-Iranians the Soma-Haoma sacrifice was performed in spring time for all the gods.⁷⁸ We have pointed out that exactly the same thing happens in the case of the Rong. The Rong-thing and the Mun, by partaking of

77. H. Lommel, *Mithra und das Stieropfer*, in *Faidecum*, Bd. III, H. 6/7, Juni 1909, p. 216 sq., p. 212.

78. H. Oldenberg, *op. cit.* p. 440 sq.

- 796 illness which is hereditary in the family. Numerous examples
 772 prove that the Shaman disposition does in fact appear as a
 ● 771 kind of illness."¹⁰⁶
 793

Our own studies have brought to light the existence of similar dispositions among the Rong. In both places there is the same conception of the spirits of Shaman. These spirits sometimes take the form of animals, *e.g.*, that of a bull. "His bull-form walks abroad, is also said by the forest Juraks, when the soul of a Shaman has departed to another world."¹⁰⁶ They also bring the deceased into the kingdom of the dead.¹⁰⁷ All these facts run a close parallel to our findings among the Rong and other primitive hunter tribes in India.

Further similarities are found in the mode of consecration and instruction. The Shaman costume however is fundamentally different. The Rong have no special costume, while among the different Siberian peoples, a wide variety of customs are worn.

(k) THE SOCIAL CLASSES OF THE RONG.

- 173 According to the general tradition existent among the Rong, they claim to have been originally a race of hunters, and that in the very early times before the Tibetans, the Bhutanese and the Nepalese had infiltrated into their country, they lived as the free rulers of the immense forests which were their home. The Lepchas have a clear knowledge of the
 824 animals, the birds, the plants, the fruits and the roots, and
 825 can tell which are poisonous and which are edible. Even
 222 today the Lepcha will not starve if the harvest fails, for he will
 261 procure as his sustenance the edible leaves, fruits and roots from the forest. One such root is the dayout-buck. After being dug up it is broken into small pieces and soaked in water
 [272] for three days to remove the poison and clear off the lye. A ferment is then added and a kind of beer produced. Another
 252 root is the dog-bo or bok-yik. It is cut up, the lye cleared,
 262 and then it is cooked and crushed. The broth is eaten like rice. This is of a pale violet colour.

106. *op. cit.* p. 462.

106. *op. cit.* p. 478.

107. *op. cit.* p. 478.

A MIRACULOUS MUMMY

297 T

Soon afterwards the house, in which the *chō-sen* was kept, fell down. The *chō-sen* itself was broken, the corpse was uncovered and went tumbling down the hill-side, four hundred feet, rolling over and over. When the people went to look at it, they were astonished to find that not only was the corpse uninjured, except for a cut near one of the ankles, but that the flesh on the body was as fresh as during the lady's lifetime. They found, too, that it was pure flesh, and not built up with clay, as is the regular practice. The body was carried up the hill again and is encased now in a fresh *chō-sen*. All believe this story with the single-minded devotion to their religion that characterizes the Tibetan. They believe also that when the body was placed in the *chō-sen*, the cut would gradually heal up, as the lady was 'like a manifestation of the Buddha'.

The religion of the Lepchas of Sikkim resembles in many ways the pre-Buddhist faith of Tibet, known as *Pön*. As to their funeral ceremonies the History of Sikkim says:

'When a person dies and a funeral ceremony has to be performed, it is done thus: They sacrifice a bull or cow, a fowl or pig, and believe that this is the present of the deceased to the spirits of his ancestors. For this purpose they slay a pig, and, having pierced the entire length of its body with a sharpened bamboo stake, the *Pön-pön* recites some prayers or incantations called *Pön* for three days and nights.'

The Lepchas believe that their spirits are taken after death through subterranean passages to the local deities of Kinchinjunga—the highest mountain in Sikkim and the third highest in the world—as well as to those of other mountains. Different sub-tribes among the Lepchas have different subterranean passages.

But Buddhism, after the Tibetan pattern, is firmly set in Sikkim. And therefore many Lepchas nowadays resort to Buddhist rites. As in Tibet throughout the centuries,

* The pronunciation usual among Europeans. The correct pronunciation is *Kang Chen Dō Nga*, 'The Five Treasures of Great Snow'.

298

THE LAST RITE^c

L and as in Mongolia since Sō-nam Gya-tso conducted his
 ● 771 campaign of conversion and reform, so in Sikkim also
 L Buddhism is steadily pushing out the older faith. One of
 764 my Lepcha servants died, leaving no children, brothers or
 T sisters, but a widow only. The other Lepchas in my
 employ at once subscribed one rupee each for a lama to
 perform the funeral ceremonies.

533 In Tibet there is a funeral hymn, ascribed, as are so
 764 many other writings, to King Song-tsen Gam-po. It por-
 trays the sorrows of old age, the pains of death, the four
 kinds of funeral, the terrors of the Judgement, and ends
 on a note of repentance. It is too long to quote in full,
 but I should like to give the three concluding verses. My
 translation is no doubt a bald one, but it expresses the
 Tibetan original with fair accuracy.

Gone is all the wealth he gathered, snapped
 up by whoever can;

But the sins he gathered in the taking of
 that wealth remain.

So by dreadful myrmidons he's led before the
 Lord of Death.

Come thou down, most precious Lama, come and
 thy protection give!

From life's endless round
 deliver, highest, mightiest Chen-re-si!

Falling down th' abyss into the three gre^t
 Regions of the Damned,

Feeling nothing fixed, but driven like a
 feather by the wind,

Powerless along the cliffside path that
 down the *Bar-do* runs.

Come thou down, most precious Lama, &c.

Youth with rising powers has passed^d
 regardless of the Holy Faith;

Now in life's declining years I put
 aside all slothfulness.

Grant that I may thus go forward steadfast
 while this life shall last.